

COMBATING ACIDS IN CITY FOG

EXPERIMENTS WITH AMMONIA GAS

Experiments are to be carried out this winter on a possible method of combating the sulphur acids in city fog. These acids are thought to be the cause of lung irritation which can be serious, especially to sufferers from bronchitis. The method consists of releasing small quantities of ammonia to neutralize acids in the air.

During London's "killer" fog in 1952 a number of prize cattle at the Smithfield show died in spite of improvised methods to save them such as breathing masks soaked in whisky. No pigs or sheep died at the show. The cattle were kept under the most hygienic conditions possible, while the pigs and sheep lived in more natural surroundings. It was possible that the ammonia gas, given off from the pigs' and sheep's litter, mixed with the air they breathed with beneficial effect, and this seemed to point to the use of ammonia as a possible way of preventing damage to human lungs attributed to acid vapours, particularly during fog.

WORD OF WARNING

The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research states that in the experiment the atmospheric pollution section of the Fuel Research Station is cooperating with St. Bartholomew's Hospital, where outpatients and some medical staff have been issued with a bottle containing a solution of ammonia and a wick which can be pulled up and the ammonia gas thereby released into the atmosphere of a room. As the proportion of ammonia must be exact enough to neutralize the acids, the Fuel Research Station has also developed a special paper to measure the acidity of the atmosphere. If the atmosphere is too acid the paper turns red; if too much ammonia is being released it turns blue. The correct balance is shown by the paper turning greenish-yellow.

The D.S.I.R. emphasize that the experiment is in its preliminary stages and it is too early yet to say if it will be successful. "Above all, it does not mean that ammonia should be used indiscriminately about the house during a 'smog.' This may be dangerous, particularly if small children can get their hands on it."

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The Times (London, England), Friday, Oct 28, 1955; pg. 11; Issue 53363. (362 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS186209628